

Government Orders

The official opposition believes—and as you know, the official opposition's predictions tend to be very accurate—that the Minister of Finance, the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard, a Montreal member, may wish to put on the table a redistribution rule that might severely penalize Quebec. We think that redistribution of wealth might be based on population.

As several speakers have said in the House, the Minister of Finance, who has systematically refused to exclude the possibility of dividing the Canada social transfer envelope on the basis of population, may well decide that Quebec will have to absorb 41.7 per cent of the cuts in transfer payments to all provinces in Canada in 1997–98, which would mean that in 1997–98, if that is the basis on which the government intends to operate, Quebec will have to absorb not \$1.2 billion but \$1.9 billion in forgone revenue. And that is why the Quebec government has reacted very negatively to Bill C–76.

What is most absurd in this situation is that the federal government intervenes in the area of health. Here again, any outsider looking in the Constitution Act of 1867 or the one of 1982, to find the authority, legitimacy or jurisdiction behind the government's involvement in the field of health would be searching in vain.

But everyone knows that there is a Department of National Health in Ottawa, Health Canada, which requires about \$1 billion just in order to operate, to pay the salaries of the public servants there. This figure does not include the money allocated by the Minister of Finance in his budget to run its various programs.

According to an article published last month in a learned publication there were more public servants at Health Canada than in the individual provincial departments of health.

This is not the least of the contradictions. There is a two tier structure, with the result that, even before any thought is given to transferring funds to the provinces so they can actually provide health care services to the public, funds must go to a structure that requires \$1 billion simply to operate. This is the same sort of absurdity we find in the fight against AIDS.

• (1020)

The federal government is trying to establish a continent-wide health policy, which is impossible, because the level of administration in the best position to be effective and provide the finest and most useful service to Canadians, cannot be the government farthest removed from them. And the government farthest removed from them is the government in Ottawa.

The federal government's attempt to set up a national health policy, which aims necessarily at meeting the needs of communities from Newfoundland to British Columbia, is just as absurd as what it is doing in the fight against AIDS.

What happens when the government tries to intervene in the health field? Let us have a look at Canada's strategy in the fight against AIDS. In the early 1980s, with the appearance of this most terrible disease, which will cruelly mark the turn of the century, the government decided it should act.

Instead of using its tax leverage to mandate the provinces and transferring additional resources to them so they could be the real agents and fight AIDS intelligently, the federal government established a national strategy.

It is an extremely loose national strategy, which really lacks substance and is extremely inefficient, since we all well know that the governments of Newfoundland, of Quebec, of Ontario, of Saskatchewan would have been better suited than the federal government to lead the campaign, given their expertise in the area of palliative care and health care.

The result is that the government has to maintain an extremely cumbersome administration and that situations arise like the one that arose last year. The federal government voted in its AIDS strategy, and allocated it a budget of \$42 million which was not spent. The federal government, because it is the government level furthest removed from the people and because it has nothing to do with health care, is unable to deliver services in the field, and the concrete result of this is that it is not able to spend the allocated budgets approved by Parliament.

I see that this surprises government members, but it is nevertheless the case. I will conclude by saying that last year, of the \$42 million that the government allocated for the AIDS campaign, only \$34 million were spent, and not in the most useful ways. This is why people have gotten the impression that the federal government is not the most efficient level of government.

[English]

Mr. Jesse Flis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the hon. member. I thank him for his intervention.

He complained about the transfer payments from the federal government to the Quebec government being reduced. I wonder if he could share with us how as a country we can reduce the deficit and the heavy debt which is plaguing the country. If we could balance the books, as six provinces have already done and if we could wipe out the public debt, we could put a lot more money into such programs as the hon. member is talking about, for example, helping people affected with AIDS and so on.

Somehow the provincial and federal governments have to work more efficiently, more co-operatively to try to avoid any duplication. Then we will reach the goals that he wants to reach not only for Quebec but for the entire country.